

VZCZCXR07706  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #4146/01 3551151  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P 211151Z DEC 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4966  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004146

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2017

TAGS: PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: PRT-WASIT: 57 WASIT SHEIKHS TOUR IRAN AT MALIKI'S INVITATION

REF: DIIR-TFM-81-819-08-107

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S//REL TO USA, ACGU) Summary. According to an influential ePRT contact, 57 Wasit Sheikhs visited Iran from 21 November to 6 December at the invitation of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki. While in Iran, the sheiks received lectures in "five-star hotels," met religious leaders and visited Shi'a shrines and the former U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Themes repeatedly sounded by the hosts included: appeals to join fellow Muslims to fight the Americans in Iraq, encouragement to send their sons to Iran for education, and the need to support Iraqi "federalism." Sheikh Mohammed said this was the second such tour, and that the first, for 37 Wasit sheikhs, occurred approximately two months ago. End summary.

The Invitation and Border

---

¶2. (S//REL TO USA, ACGU) On 18 December, CDR 214th Fires Brigade, Team Leader 819th HUMINT Collection Team and IPAO PRT-Wasit met with Sheikh Mohammad on FOB Delta in Al Kut. Sheikh Mohammad said he and 56 other Wasit sheikhs had recently returned from a fifteen-day, all expenses paid visit to Tehran, Qom and Mashad that took place between 21 November and 6 December. The invitations, from Ayatollah Khamenei, were delivered to Wasit province sheikhs by Mohammed al-Numani, a Wasit-based representative of Nuri Kamel Maliki. A tourism company called "The Sons Ruhullah" organized the trip. (Note. Ruhullah is the first name of the former Supreme Leader of Iran, Grand Ayatollah Ruhullah Musawi Khomeini. End note.) Sheikh Mohammed said a tour bus took the sheikhs from Al Kut to the Zurbatiyah Point of Entry where an unnamed Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement Lieutenant boarded the bus, collected passports, and stamped and returned them without further immigration or customs checks (Refel). Upon arrival in Iran, the sheikhs were greeted by an unknown Iranian cleric while passports were stamped. After expedited immigration, the group ate lunch in Mehran and proceeded to Tehran.

The Visit

---

¶3. (S//REL TO USA, ACGU) Sheikh Mohammed said the Tehran visit included tours of the Ayatollah Khamenei Palace, the grave/shrine of Ayatollah Khomeini and the closed US Embassy compound where the hosts lectured on the 1979 victory over 'The Great Satan.' After Tehran, the group continued to Qom and Mashhad for tours of Shi'a shrines and other sites of interest.

The Messages

---

¶4. (S//REL TO USA, ACGU) Sheikh Mohammed said that throughout the visit, the hosts lectured their guests on Iranian policies and positions. The general theme was partnership:

Muslims must unite to fight the US because "together we are more powerful than the Americans," and that Iraq could look like Europe with Iran's help. The Iranians encouraged the sheikhs to send their sons to Iran for education and advised them to support federalism in Iraq. When asked if 'federalism' meant a regional southern government like the Kurds have in the North, Mohammed said yes. In the midst of the anti-American rhetoric, an apparent unintended message slipped through in Qom from Sheikh Fadl al Maliki, an Iraqi originally from Al Hay. According to Mohammed, Sheikh al Maliki told the group that the current Iraqi government should be voted out of office and that Iraqis were better off siding with Americans rather than Iranians. (Note. In this context, the term Sheikh refers to a Shi'a cleric, not a tribal leader. End note.)

15. (S//REL TO USA, ACGU) Mohammed said that despite the fact that all the sheikhs knew the trip had been arranged by Prime Minister Maliki and Da'wa, there was no overt pressure to support Da'wa or Maliki in future elections.

Comment

-----  
16. (S//NF) Comment: Possible motivations for Iranian overtures to the Wasit tribal community include (1) response to CF/PRT tribal engagement and preemption of CF-sponsored tribal mobilization to combat Iranian influence as Anbar tribes mobilized to combat AQI, (2) effort to build popular support for Iranian-favored political parties in advance of provincial elections and support for formation of a southern region in advance of the April 2008 implementation of the Regional Formation Law, (3) recruitment of future agents should the tribal community produce viable political leaders, and (4) solicitation of potential intelligence collectors.

BAGHDAD 00004146 002 OF 002

In the course of its work, the PRT will monitor Iranian connections with the Wasit tribal community as well as the increasing number of interactions between the provincial government and tribal leaders, all seemingly geared to shore up the ailing reputation and unpopularity of the now-governing political parties. End Comment.

Bio Notes

-----  
17. (S//REL TO USA, ACGU) Sheikh Mohammed is a member of the Al-Sarayi tribe, in the Al Rabi'ah Tribal Confederation. Key Iraqi contacts, including the Provincial Police Chief, identify Sheik Mohamed as a senior, influential tribal sheikh in Wasit. He identifies himself as a friend to the U.S. and meets regularly with the ePRT. In November, he signed a Critical Infrastructure Security Contract with CF to assist with security for Wasit Highway 15 (Alternate Supply Route Desna) from Al Kut to the Iranian border. He has told us on several occasions of his contempt for Iran and Persian influence within the Wasit government and political parties now in power. He claims to have served as a Colonel in the Iraqi Army and taken part in the Iran-Iraq war. Sheikh Mohammed is not pious and recently noted that he enjoyed celebrating Eid with a few drinks. He considers himself a true Arab and Iraqi patriot. When asked why he traveled to Iran, he said after many years of confinement under Saddam Hussein, it was an opportunity to see "the North." He denied having received money from Iranian intelligence officers (although he said some of his fellow sheikhs did) and that he refused to visit the Ayatollah Khomeini grave/shrine with the tour group in Tehran. End bio notes.

CROCKER